

# BOSTON INFORMER

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## Boston's Innovation District

Mayor Menino's announcement the South Boston Seaport District will become Boston's Innovation District sent many scurrying to Google "Innovation District" to see what it means. Urban design pabulum about this district includes terms like "urban lab" and "innovative housing." We didn't find much to help us out.

As we interviewed dozens of urban theorists, real estate experts, developers and the guys at the coffee shop, we discovered that the Seaport District was selected to be the Innovation District not because it took 25 years to get three buildings on the Fan Pier/Pier 4 site and needs a boost, but because it is almost an island, a self-contained unit with controlled access and egress. Kind of like the U.S. Pavilion, a geodesic dome, at Montreal's Expo '67 that was a mini-city itself. Sure enough, the BRA's model of the downtown now shows the Innovation District completely covered by a glass dome, reinforcing the district, keeping ideas inside and creating a special mystique. Not to mention steady jobs for window washers.

## Revenue Raising Ideas

It's hard to believe that the City and State continue to have trouble balancing their budgets given all of the revenue-enhancing ideas we have provided free of charge over the years. The Boston Informer's editorial board met recently with Speaker of the House DullLeo, Mayor Menino and Gov. Patrick to offer more suggestions.

- Install slot machines on MBTA commuter rail platforms so passengers can play while they wait and wait.
- Convert the popular Rings Fountain on the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway to be coin operated (\$1 for 5 minutes).
- Retrofit bike racks with meters and enforce existing rules against locking bikes to poles.
- Expand sales of surplus City of Boston junk through eBay, offering parking meters, street signs with typos, surplus carbon paper, "Kevin from Heaven" and "Ted Kennedy for President" buttons available to the highest bidder.
- Sell naming rights to conference rooms, libraries, common areas and bathrooms in city and state office buildings.
- Allow parking on interim basis on City Hall Plaza and charge market rates.
- Promote fitness by charging for riding on elevators in state office buildings and encouraging people to walk.
- Sell permits for double-parking parking on Boylston Street in Back Bay at premium rates.

## Greening of City Hall Plaza

"Proto-schemes" for greening City Hall Plaza have given way to new ideas for low-maintenance, hip, sustainable and vandal-resistant improvements. Architects from Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright's home/school in Arizona, heard about the Greening City Hall program and offered a new approach. They convinced the City's planners that "green" is passe; the planned trees will drop a ton of leaves for "someone" to rake; and chances of the trees surviving in 4 feet of soil (subway tunnels run underneath) is miniscule. The Taliesin West associates suggested a lower-impact, simpler way to make City Hall Plaza more environmentally friendly: a cactus field.





## Movies Not to Miss!

**127 Hours** — a documentary surveying the perception of people attending community meetings about how long they last.

**The Social Network** — a touching story of a prominent Massachusetts politician taking care of his extended family by finding them well-paying government jobs.

**Another Year** — a documentary survey of developers asking how long before their projects start.

**True Grit** — an inspiring tale of the adversities a courageous politician overcomes when he states that to balance the budget, taxes must be raised and spending cut.

**Drive Angry** — a psychological drama about the mental state of Boston drivers.

**The Adjustment Bureau** — a study of the workings of a new department set up by the MBTA to adjust the published commuter rail timetables to reality so that no train is ever late.

**The Company Men** — a heartwarming epic of executives being rewarded with millions of dollars in spite of running their companies into bankruptcy.



### MBTA Emergency Substitute Transportation

Despite the problems faced by MBTA riders—especially commuter rail riders—this winter, the MBTA deserves credit for getting people safely to their destinations, albeit late. The MBTA's creative use of a variety of substitute vehicles helped pick up the slack when locomotives died and rapid transit vehicles were derailed. The vehicle below was credited with carrying all passengers and their belongings (must have been a lot of returning college students) from an entire commuter rail train bound for Worcester express from Framingham to Union Station.



### Fort Point Channel Again

The City of Boston's 2002 "Fort Point Channel Watersheet Activation Plan" hasn't had the greatest economic climate to really get going. While everyone waits for the South Station/U.S. Post Office project that would likely transform that part of the Fort Point Channel but could be more than a decade away from happening, the City and boating clubs are joining forces to improve access across the Channel north of Gillette. This "bring your own boat" program will be in place weekends from June through September.



### Programming the Greenway

The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenback Conservancy continues to work on creating activities to keep people on the Greenway instead of fleeing to Faneuil Hall to buy a \$7 ice cream cone. Last year's efforts included high-end food carts which really took off with the tourists when vendors figured out how to mold baked beans onto a stick for a portable delight.

At a recent Greenback Conservancy Board meeting, the executive director learned that participation in extreme sports has risen among all age cohorts by 32% in the last seven years, and programming extreme activities could be the key to the kingdom for the Greenway. After being told that the existing merry-go-round doesn't qualify, the Conservancy hired Nuts-R-Us consultants to develop a parachute-jump (convertible to bungee-jump) for now-hopeless Parcel 6.



## What's Up?

### Mayors Daley and Bloomberg Didn't Think of This

Attempting to prove that Boston is still the Hub of the solar system, Mayor Thomas Menino will introduce A new "Tommy Card" for Boston residents and workers on April 1. The card, which will be made of recycled collar stays, will be similar to the MBTA Charlie Card. The Tommy Card, featuring Mayor Menino's smiling mug, can be used for any payments due to the City—parking tickets, excise tax, property tax, dog licenses, etc. Cards will be mailed to City residents and made available to non-residents on-line. Following the April 1 rollout, the City will consider implementing entry fees for City buildings including City Hall, Inspectional Services Dept., schools and all libraries which could be charged to a Tommy Card. Some City officials speculate that the entry fees might deter visitors—certainly not the intent—and reduce the need for staff at these facilities. The Tommy Card was designed by Trixie Watson, former Boston Informer intern. A hip-hop tune is being created by the remaining "Boston" band members to match the Kingston Trio's "Charlie on the MTA" and is based on the Elvis tune "Money Honey."

**Bike Share Concept Expands**—Boosted by the popularity of Zipcar car sharing and bike sharing and the growth of a movement promoting "sharing" through non-profit do-gooder organizations, Mayor Menino wants to follow suit. Menino and consultant former 1970s New York Yankees pitcher Fritz Peterson, an early adopter of the sharing culture (his wife), announced a plethora of "Share Programs" including truck share, skateboard share, dog share, cat share, python share (MBTA special car), penguin share (N.E. Aquarium), blender share, and curling iron share. All Share Programs can be charged to the Tommy Card.

**MBTA Deficit-Reduction Plan On Track** — If "victory has a hundred fathers and defeat is an orphan," then the MBTA, defeated by winter weather, is this year's orphan of the year. But things are looking up for the MBTA with the purchase of "gently used" replacement locomotives and a sound plan to reduce its staggering deficit. Plans to sell parking revenue got a lot of press, but another program has been largely overlooked. The MBTA plans to reduce its workforce by close to 2,500, seeking volunteer drivers to take the wheel on buses and rapid transit vehicles. General Manager Richard Daffy said, "With a little training, we can take advantage of commuters who are as punctual as our own drivers to drive the bus downtown. They get a free ride and the thrill of driving a really big bus." He added volunteer drivers would be screened for the usual and would be asked probing psychological questions to see if they harbor thoughts of re-enacting Sandra Bullock's antics in the movie Speed.

**Have a Seat** — Budget cuts eliminating permanent seating coupled with concerns that homeless or tired people might sit "too long" has created the need for portable seating around City of Boston parks.



Chair entrepreneurs have already been seen at Shakespeare on Common after 85 people seated on the grass needed help getting up after two hours of sitting cross-legged like a 10-year-old. Here, two enterprising developers work their way to Copley Square after dropping the first bunch at Post Office Square.

### What is This?

Be the first to correctly identify the object in the photo below and win a valuable prize. Clues are provided but they may not actually relate to this photo.



Clues:

- ◆ TSA public address system features...
- ◆ Solar-powered summertime device...
- ◆ 1960s-era viewing stand for...

Send all guesses to The Boston Informer via e-mail to [bostoninformer@cs.com](mailto:bostoninformer@cs.com). "Valuable prize" is a completely subjective term and award of the prize is subject to the quality of the entries and how many renewals and new subscribers we get this month.

### Headlines You'll Never Read

- ✓ Legislature admits role in creating giant MBTA deficits
- ✓ Regional Bike Share program equipment costs drop, revenue from users up
- ✓ Declaring walking too slow, WalkBoston re-focuses on promoting skateboards, inline skates
- ✓ MassDOT contract with Parsons Brinckerhoff approved with no objections
- ✓ MBTA eliminates 'bus bunching' problems
- ✓ Gambling revenue transforms Mass.
- ✓ BRA invites Hub Ticket back to Stuart Street site in Theater District
- ✓ Filene's developer, Menino to work together



## Welcome to The Boston MisInformer,

the annual April Fool's issue of The Boston Informer, an otherwise "serious" newsletter covering development, construction and transportation downtown.

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*Mayor Menino declares the South Boston Seaport District the new "Innovation District" and seeks groundbreaking technologies...*



The Mayor is right—  
Boston is the source of basic research.

## Mis THE BOSTON INFORMER

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## You Were Asking

- Q. So the Convention Center Authority wants to expand in So. Boston. Can you explain why the Authority says the So. Boston facility is such a success when it essentially shut down the private Bayside Expo Center (now non-taxable property) and simply shifted visitors from the Hynes to So. Boston?
- A. No.
- Q. I looked at the City's new Complete Streets guidelines online. Maybe I don't get it, but it looks like you'd need a street as wide as Commonwealth Avenue to fit all those modes and landscaping in. Where can they really create complete streets?
- A. Very few places, but the guidelines create competition for space between a bunch of users!
- Q. How come I haven't heard anything about upgrading Downtown Crossing recently?
- A. Did you notice the Filene's hole is still there? The new Business Improvement District and other initiatives are irrelevant until the Filene's hole is gone.
- Q. I thought I heard the MBTA received some new buses that spoke clearly so passengers could understand. Where are these "well-spoken" buses?
- A. You must mean the MBTA's big articulated buses that bend in the middle. They are on the Silver Line, Rte. 39, and Rte 28.
- Q. I count on you to keep me up on the saga of the Hub Ticket site, the place I bought a ticket for a Bruce Springsteen concert for \$9 in 1975. What's up with redevelopment plans that kicked my friend out?
- A. Nothing. The BRA recently granted another one-year extension of the designation; 29 years of "planning" and counting.